

## EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROCUREMENT FUNCTIONS OF DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES IN GHANA

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### ABSTRACT

*Procurement functions in most District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies in Ghana are the preserve of the political appointees who head these institutions and often see purchases as a way of giving jobs to political party affiliates rather than using procurement practice to achieve organizational goals also, majority of staffs do not hold professional procurement qualification thereby failing to align procurement practices with organizational goals. As a result, most of these functions are not carried out by designated procurement staff, moreover, procurement staffs are consulted too late in the procurement process. From the foregoing, there appeared to be the widespread violation of the procurement law and one is not too sure of the procurement strategies being implemented by these districts, municipal and metropolitan assemblies. The study was therefore to investigate the effects of political influences on the procurement functions of district assemblies in Ghana. It was revealed that political interferences had significant effects on the procurement functions of district assemblies in Ghana. Political influences in district assembly procurement were seen in the areas of selection of suppliers/contractors, selection of procurement officials, procurement process circumventions, and the choice of projects. The effects of these influences include Selection of poor quality suppliers, Employment of poor quality procurement officials, Lack of transparency in procurement processes, and Increase in the costs of procurement of goods.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Political Influences, Procurement Functions & District Assemblies*

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

It has long become abundantly clear to the central government that perhaps an effective means of running the country is through decentralizing the ministries, departments, and agencies within its administrative framework. Consequently, Ghana has been partitioned into 216 District Assemblies with plans underway to create more districts. Reoccurring these grass-root structures have been easy in terms of logistical support, human capital and the requisite infrastructure.

Given the scarce revenue base of the country which is worsened by the dwindling tax input as a result of SME businesses folding up, it stands to reason that the personnel tasked to oversee and administer local governance, develop strategic procurement management practices which will ensure that value for money is always achieved in all procurement environment. Rowlinson et. al. (2009), defines procurement as the “process of

obtaining services, supplies, and equipment in conformity with applicable law and regulations. Wyld (2011) also notes that “procurement covers all purchasing activities whose purpose is to give the buyer the best value for money”. In the view of Hawkins *et.al.* (2009), procurement provides an opportunity for firms and organizations to contribute to a position of competitive advantage by reducing the price and the transaction costs associated with purchasing goods and services”.

In contemporary organizational setting, Pakkala (2002) argues that the strategic nature of procurement cannot be overemphasized. Indeed across the world, Hunja (2003) notes that in both corporate and governmental procurement, the practice of purchasing has moved from a localized operational activity to one that is more consolidated and strategic both in nature and practice. Azeem (2007) explains further that “a principal driver in this shift has been the need to produce per unit cost savings through better acquisition practices”. Tassabehji (2010) is also of the opinion that organizations which perceive procurement as a purely administrative function, might not be taking advantage of the benefits of new procurement technologies with the liability of improving efficiency, costs saving as well as building healthy relationships with supply chain partners.

Callender and Mathews (2002) see procurement management as a knowledge area that has to do with selecting vendors, negotiating their terms as well as working towards managing the ongoing relationships with them. In most cases, especially with the decentralized political structures in Ghana, procurement activities are conducted by project managers who are managing various developmental projects. In other instances, the purchasing department or high-level manager takes charge of procurement activities.

A few years ago, Ghana Government realized the enormous amounts of money that went down the drain as a result of uncoordinated and unregulated procurement activities of ministries departments and agencies. Consequently, the Public Procurement Act (Act 663) was promulgated in 2003 to introduce some sanity into the procurement functions of public institutions. One of the objectives of the Public Procurement Act, Act 663 was to ensure that the country receives value for every ‘pesewa’ spent on procurement. This law has been in operation for some time now and it is appropriate that a study is done to investigate how the public sector is using it to achieve its organizational goals.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Procurement functions in most District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies in Ghana are the preserve of the political appointees who head these institutions and often see purchases as a way of giving jobs to political party affiliates rather than using procurement practice to achieve organizational goals also, majority of staffs do not hold professional procurement qualification thereby failing to align procurement practices with organizational goals. As a result, most of these functions are not carried out by designated procurement staff, moreover, procurement staffs are consulted too late in the procurement process.

From the foregoing, there appears to be a widespread violation of the procurement law and one is not too sure of the procurement strategies being implemented by these districts, municipal and metropolitan assemblies. Some assemblies also have overly-large suppliers base often caused by maverick buying, dis-aggregation, lack of coordination and focus on dyadic supply relationship rather than supply chain management, all of which run counter to achieving organizational goal. Such overly-large supplier base according to Soreide (2002) precipitates low-value procurement which creates inefficiencies with transaction costs out of proportion to the value of the items purchased and this constitutes the trust of

the study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This second chapter reviews contemporary publications on effective procurement management practices and corporate goals. It begins by examining the theories of the concept of the procurement management prior to examining issues on international and local perceptive of public procurement practices. Challenges to public procurement practices have also been discussed as well as its organizational management. Efforts have also been made to discuss how organizations use procurement management to achieve corporate goals.

### **Concept of Procurement Management**

Procurement management, in the view of Bolton (2004) is an important strategic activity that ensures that efficient materials are available for the smooth operation of a company. However, Azeem (2007) indicates that procurement now plays a new role in corporate performances involving value generator, integrator, and networking, positioned as a core competency, a driver of business strategy and enabler of additional business. Procurement management process according to Hardcastle (2007) includes purchase and acquisition planning, contracting planning, seller response request, seller selection, contract administration and contract closure. Dixit (2004) submit that procurement management covers the relationship between sellers (for contractors, vendors, service providers or suppliers) and buyers (clients, customers, purchaser, and service requisitions).

Tookey et al. (2001), explains that a procurement management environment which includes elements of the law, finance and accounting, risk management and politics and where PR actioners from each of these professions at times claim this function as their province. This claims staking is recognized explicitly in the various management frameworks that can be found worldwide for procurement governance and is indicative of the lack of agreement including within reform agendas, about what government procurements entails or of its strategic significance. The lack of agreement about the scope and the nature of the public procurement, in the view of Boateng (2008), are very familiar and varied within organizations in which procurement practitioners as it is between these professions. For organizations in which procurement is convinced of as a mid to low level back room activity driven by compliance, process management will be the status quo, and relatively few agendas of performance or wider policy will be met, and reform becomes endure.

Soriede (2006) indicate that alternatively where organizations conceive of procurement in terms of organizational performance usually in terms of indicators such as budget impact boarder policy expectations and compliance will be neglected. Frequently too, public sector organizations of a scale do not seem to justify anything more than a clerical approach to this function. Even where the impacts of these elements are acknowledged, there is often insufficient scope or incentive for management to coordinate or collaborate with other public sector agencies, or to develop the means and roles to reconcile transparency with substantial bodies of regulations as well as with efficiency and effectiveness objectives and related policy

Hawking and stein (2004) are of the conviction that, these elements do not readily co-exist and may even seem incompatible. For example, the commercial and operational realities of procurement efficiency and effectiveness generate management responses in opposing terms of both centralization and devolution. Only where organizations or governments recognize the appropriate scope of public procurement, balancing the process, performance, and strategic imperatives, can they develop the skills, incentives, performance measures, organizations and management tools to deliver the full range of

political/community expectations. In the absence of a comprehensive framework such as of this, government reforms can be expected to remain piecemeal and cyclical.

Callender and Mathews (2002) mentioned that procurement practitioners respond to the requirements of the own organization and will generally identify their role in terms of process management/simple procurement versus performance management/complex procurement versus strategic procurement and policy depending on whether they are smaller or larger operational organization or a central policy agency. But this role identification cannot quarantine these managers from the inherent tensions which arise from the conflicts between centralization and decentralization that is a consequence of these alternate roles.

Westring (1997) points out that, efforts to strengthen or reform public procurement will often include centralization an decentralization or devolution consideration but have rarely reconciled or even recognized the tensions between these basic constituents of procurement environment, and instead have identified the need for change with the outcomes of these problems and in doing so have often preserve or even depend the underlying divergences. Understanding these complex issues is often unappetizing both to executives and to politicians, making their reconciliation seem unachievable. The emergence of technology into this field is, however, beginning to reshape the possibilities.

### **Public Procurement Practices–International Perceptive**

According to the Acevedo et al. (2010), the last decade of the twentieth century had witnessed the start of a ‘global revolution’ in the regulation of public procurement, actually, challenges in procurement reforms are beyond procurement regulations to include procurement process, methods, procurement organization structure, workforce.

Arrowsmith and Trybus (2003), submit that procurement reforms occur constantly in all countries, developed as well as developing countries. The scope of reform varies, from reforming the whole procurement system if the system is completely dysfunctional such as the on-going procurement in Sierra Leone after a long civil war and the successful reform in the Gambia, or fixing some narrow areas in a well-developed procurement system in developed countries.

In “challenge in public procurement: comparative views of public procurement reform in the Gambia” Wayne A. Wittig and Habib Jeng describe how procurement reform was implemented in the Gambia. Through a joint effort of the world bank, Government of the Gambia and the International Trade Centre WTO/UNCTAD (ITC), a term of procurement experts developed a comprehensive approach to modernized the public procurement system of the Gambia in a model combining elements of a Central Tender Board with a procurement policy office. Local capacity is being developed in the Gambia Public Procurement Authority and in the procuring organizations to support transparent public procurement systems. Positive and objective changes lie in the new legal, regulatory and organizational framework as demonstrated by a survey of procurement organizations. Nevertheless, challenges remain extending and sustaining the reforms. Westring (1997) indicates that, the role of civil society in public procurement reforms in the Philippines highlights the role of procurement watch Inc. (PWH), a civil society organization, which was at the forefront of the advocacy for the Government Procurement Reform Act (GPRA), prior to the passage of the GPRA, there were over a hundred guidelines governing public procurement. The GPRA sought to standard and institutionalized procurement reforms and address the lack of transparency and accountability that have long plagued the Philippine government in its procurement. Tookey et al. (2009) pointed out that, to steer the process of change, support from the highest levels of leadership in the government and the private sector were found to essential.

Dixit (2004) explains that, in reforming public procurement sector in Turkey, the government spends around U. S. 25 billion on purchased goods, service and construction works each year. It can be easily understood how vital it is to have a transparent and competitive public procurement system for the country. This essay presents both a comparison of the public procurement legislation before and after the reform and a comparison of some aspects of a newly introduced system with some developed countries public procurement systems.

According to Boateng (2008), in December 2003, the Canadian Prime Minister initiated a comprehensive review of Canada's federal procurement, to ensure a "best of breed" approach with demonstrated high value for Canadian taxpayers, and created the Canada parliamentary secretary's task force in government-wide review of procurement for this purpose. In government-wide of procurement: redesigning Canadian procurement," the task force on government-wide review procurement reported on the work of the task force to date (mid-way to its planned December 2004 reported and recommendations), and set out its initial conclusions. This government-wide review had examined all aspects of procurement, from fundamental concepts such as fairness and open competition, through procurement processes and organization, to management oversight and public accountability.

In the view of Azzem (2007), U. S. Federal procurement agencies have many socioeconomic, and in particular, small business goals, but these goals are currently measured on the single metric: the percentage of total agency dollars that are awarded to small business. Finding the balance between the benefits of public procurement reform and benefits derived from small business participation is a public policy challenge. In balancing socioeconomic and public procurement reform goals, effective metrics for measuring small business participation in public procurement, Hunja (2003) support the argument that in order to accurately measure small business participation in a trans-procurement transformation' environment, more effective metrics are required. The existing metrics are effective and that the new metrics measures small business participation grater efficacy.

In the view of Hawking and Stein (2004), the evolution of procurement, from the bureaucratic, manual process to an IT systems-based approach has not obviated the apparent need to continue the search for a perfect procurement system. In the tale of two cities in the search for the perfect procurement system, *vies et. al.* (2009), examine the way in which two state-based jurisdictions in Australia have sought to develop their unique versions of a perfect procurement system. Apart from the classic management choices, between centralized and decentralized procurement platforms, the procurement policy choices, represented by the lowest purchase price or value for money, also have to resolve. Knight *et. al.* (2008) states that conflicting demands include the need to enhance government management of procurement within constraints of a tender driven contracting policy framework, while assuring high levels of probity, accountability, and transparency, whilst also satisfying the diverse governance expectations of stakeholders.

According to Hardcastle (2007), in public procurement partnerships, recent experience with public procurement efforts in the U. S suggests dissatisfaction with both governmental deliveries of services and resulting efforts to privatize or outsource these services. There is increasing recognition that both approaches should be combined to acquire increasingly complex goods and services, relying upon public procurement partnerships. Various trends have impacted public acquisition in recent years, further supporting the need for partnerships. These include the declining public procurement workforce, an expanded role for procurement practitioners, the complexity of acquiring information technology system, the need for flexibility in negotiating contracts and partnership arrangements, as well as the increasing visibility of risks and the need to manage them effectively.

According to Giancarlo Spagnolo and Federico Dini “Reputation Mechanisms and Electronic Markets: Economic issues and proposals for public procurement,” online ‘feedback mechanism,’ also known as reputation system,’ have successfully implemented in the most important private e-markets, such as Yahoo, Amazon and eBay, these appear very effective in fostering trust and cooperation among anonymous trading partners. Then they discuss how public procurement practices differ for public electronic markets and supply contracts system, providing some simple ‘rule of thumb’ for public (and private) procurement agencies that plan to set up a feedback mechanism.

In the United State, a new procurement approach, which was recently initiated, is explored by Ken Buck in overcoming resistant to a paradigm-shifting change in the federal sector: share I savings contracting: from to concept to application. Rowlin (1999) explains that the evolution of the share-in-savings (SIS) concept characterized as the ultimate performance-based contract, there has still been resistance from both the public and private sectors. Using data-driven, participatory actin researches and the author addresses some of the reasons for the slow rate of acceptance; and then analyze the impact of strategic initiatives aimed at increasing acceptance and ultimately greater utilization of the concept.

In the United Kingdom, public procurement policy may be categorized in term of their regulatory, commercial and socio-economic focus. According to Acevedo et. al . (2010), public procurement policy in terms of the framework of values culminating in the concept of public value, reflect not only government goals but also broader societal values. The author found that there has been an partial delivery of commercial improvements.

These improvements, however, have been uneven across departments as there has been the overemphasis on regulatory requirements at the expense of socio-economic development. Co-economic development. While procurements contribution to wider government policy is increasing, its full potential will only is realized when is delivering on socio-economic policies and thereby contributing across the full range of values. This argument will be illustrated with particular reference to a pilot project on increasing employment through public service and construction projects in Northern Ireland.

That there are different kinds of procurement and logistics activities in municipalities and hospital districts. The authors examine whether there were differences in procurement between the municipal public organizations in Find land and how the finish municipal public entities differ from benchmarking information in other countries. They try to identify best practices in different parts of municipal public procurement.

Azeem (2007)states that, although the provision of basic public services has historically been considered a core state function, during the last decade governments have been increasingly moving towards the various options of private participation in a constant quest to improve the quality of services in a cost-effective manner. There appears to be considerable advantage “ in contracting out” services using performance based schemes that delegate service to providers under legally binding agreements trying payments to measurable outputs delivered at predefined quality level. Soriede, (2006) mentioned that public procurement is a multifaceted challenges field; and public procurement practitioners have faced numerous challenges caused by diverse factors.

### **Effects of Political Influences in Procurement**

Goldman, Rochol and So (2008) analyzed whether political connections of the board of directors of public traded companies in the USA affected the allocation of government procurement contract. The study focussed on the change in

control of both House and Senate following the 1994 election. It found out that companies with boards connected to the winning (losing) party experienced a significant and large increase (decrease) in procurement contracts after the election. The results remained significant after controlling for industry classifications as well as for other company characteristics. The findings indicated one of the main avenues which corporate political connections added value to US companies.

Hansson (2011) indicated that using private contractors through procurement is common in most public sector areas. Despite the benefits of procurement, officials are sometimes tempted to circumvent procurement regulations. The aim of the research was to investigate the strategies used by local government decision makers to bypass procurement regulations and to analyze the rationality the rationality of the actions of the officials. The study revealed that officials were pressurized by public and local interest groups, making municipal officials deviate from procurement regulations.

## METHODOLOGY

The study area is the New Juabeng Municipal Assembly (NJMA), one of the decentralized administrative structures established to facilitate local governance in Ghana. The study population included staff members in all units in the assembly, which is made up of records, estate, logistics, procurement, HR. management, administration, procurement, and stores, planning, budgeting and rating, MIS, statistics, security, transport units.

The sample size for this research was (60). It comprised Account unit, Procurements and Stores units, Planning units, Human resources units were considered. The random selection technique was used to administer questionnaires to management and staff.

Purposive sampling or judgmental sampling technique was adopted in drawing up the sample for the study.

## RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of data collected on the field with aid of the questionnaires and interviews.

**Table 1: Political Influences**

	<b>Influences</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Selection of supplier /contractors	13	21.7	21.7	21.7
	Selection of procurement officials	17	28.3	28.3	50.0
	Procurement process	20	33.7	33.3	83.3
	Choice of projects	10	16.7	16.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

**Source:** Field Survey 2016

From the Table 1 above, the political influences in district assembly procurement are Selection of suppliers/contractors, Selection of procurement officials, Procurement process, and Choice of projects. The respective absolute frequencies are 13, 17, 20, and 10. This means that political parties control all the mentioned procurement activities.

**Table 2: Effects of Political Influences in District Assembly Procurement**

	Benefits	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Selection of poor quality suppliers	11	18.3
	Employment of poor quality procurement officials	14	23.3
	Lack of transparency in procurement processes	12	20
	Circumventions of procurement processes	12	20
	Increase in the costs of procurement of goods	11	18.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2016

Table 2 presents the effects of Political influences in district assembly procurement. 11 respondents representing 18.3 percent of the total respondents believed the effects to be Selection of poor quality suppliers, 14 respondents who made up 23.3 percent of the total respondents believed it to be Employment of poor quality procurement officials, 12 respondents totaling 20 percent of the whole respondents believed the effects to be Lack of transparency in procurement processes, and another 12 respondents totaling 20 percent of the whole respondents believed the effects to be Circumventions of procurement processes. The former viewpoint is in line with the findings of Owusu-Bempah, (2013). The last 11 respondents representing 18.3 percent of the total respondents believed the effects to be an Increase in the costs of procurement of goods.

**Table 3: The Level of Political Influences in District Assembly Procurement**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	9	15	15.0	15.0
	Very High	20	33.3	33.3	48.3
	Extremely High	31	51.7	51.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source:** Field Survey 2016

Table 3 represents the level of political influence in district assembly procurement. Out of the 60 valid responses obtained, 9 selected high, 20 selected very high and 31 selected extremely high. The respective valid percentages of the responses were 15, 33.3, and 51.7 respectively. The result was not surprising as there was a common perception about it.

**Table 4: The Level of Attention to be Paid to the Political Influences**

	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Highest	60	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source:** Field Survey 2016

Inferring from Table 4, all the respondents were unanimous. They all considered the level of attention that must be paid to the political interferences in district assembly procurement to be highest.

## CONCLUSIONS

Political interferences have significant effects on the procurement functions of district assemblies in Ghana. Political influences in district assembly procurement are seen in the areas of selection of suppliers/contractors, selection of procurement officials, procurement process circumventions, and the choice of projects. The effects of these influences include Selection of poor quality suppliers, Employment of poor quality procurement officials, Lack of transparency in



procurement processes, and Increase in the costs of procurement of goods. The findings were similar to that of Goldman, Rocholl, and So(2013).

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